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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #0252 12/29/00

~ People Are Talking! ~ Happy New Year!!! ~ Free ISPs, Or Not
~ Privacy Debate Lingers ~ Interface Editor Free! ~ StarOffice For Mac?
~ Bush Win Helps Gates? ~ Nintendo To Buy Sega?! ~ Napster Update!
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-* Falcon "Towers II" Freeware! *-
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-* NetZero Files Patent Infringement At Juno! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

It's been quite a few weeks since the last time that I really had something to say within these pages - at least seriously. Since it's our last issue of our second year publishing - 2001 is almost upon us - I'd like to reflect on the past year, and thank the people who have helped make, and keep, A-ONE successful.

First of all, my thanks to all of you who read A-ONE week after week. Over the past year I have received numerous e-mails from many of you expressing your appreciation of what we've been doing. Believe it or not, those messages mean a lot to us.

Secondly, my "partner-in-crime" Joe Mirando deserves a lot of credit. Not only does he contribute a weekly column for the magazine, but he also helps me maintain my sanity with his weekly banter. I think we keep each other going, week after week!

And people like Scott Dowdle and Rob Mahlert have been tremendous behind the scenes for us. Not only have they been working on our web site and pages, but they have also been supportive in other ways. Also, the general membership of Delphi's Atari Advantage forum continues to be the backbone of online support for us. The folks online there are, simply put, the best! And even though we don't "see" them as regularly as we'd like, guys like Albert Dayes and Michael Burkley are still around. We're hoping that over the new year we'll see more of them in these pages.

Continuing to do a weekly online magazine - with support for the Atari platform - has been difficult. Why do we continue, you might ask? If you do, you're a casual user, or not one at all. You old-timers understand what I mean.

When we started A-ONE, we had some big plans. Things like our dealer resource and Atari software catalog haven't been forgotten. Reviews and interviews have been sparse, but continue. Our excuse? Simply stated, we're human. We're all older and have more and more responsibilities that don't always allow us the time necessary for these kinds of projects. Will they happen? I certainly hope so. Time will tell.

So, another year is about over. I can't believe we're about to embark on our third year of A-ONE! Naturally, we'll start it of with a bang around here. We're about to be on the receiving end of a major Nor'easter here tomorrow. They predict over a foot of snow! My back is already starting to hurt and I don't even have a shovel in my hands!

While my wife and I will spend New Year's Eve at home, many of you will be out revelling in the New Year. Nothing wrong with that, but please do so

responsibly! Party like crazy! Just remember that if you want to drink, let someone else drive. In that way, you'll increase all of our chances to be back here next year!

Happy New Year! from all of us here at A-ONE!

Until next time...

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Towers II for the Falcon Is Now Freeware

"For X-mas we decided to release an unrestricted version of Towers II - Plight of the Stargazer for the Atari Falcon. Towers II was originally released in 1995 for the Atari Falcon, using Hi-Color graphics, smooth-scrolling 3D, and the DSP for a 16bit stereo MOD player. Since that time, Towers II has made its way to the Atari Jaguar in 1996, Windows 95 in 1997, and will debut on the Game Boy Color (as a Step 3D graphic game) in 2001."

You can download the game from:

http://ftp.jvgames.com/towersii.zip

INTERFACE Resource Editor Available

Hi all!

Spotted this bit of news on the german Atari news sites. Might be of interest! Olaf Meisiek, the author of the resource editor Interface, has released it for free download exclusively from the homepage of Gerd Heller. It is NOT freeware and so may not be distributed, so you have to download directly from Gerd's website.

The url is http://www.hadley.de but apparently the site is not 100% compatible with atari browsers (Javascript and such I guess...) so they also kindly supply the link directly to the Interface Archive:

http://www.hadley.dusnet.de/atari/dateien/intrface.zip

(The GFA-Interpreter 3.5 is also available for download)

Have fun,
Jerry Martin

8-bit Atari BASIC Source Book Online

The full text of the Atari BASIC Source Book is now available for downloading at:

http://www.ping.be/kim-1__6502/

and

ftp://ftp.spudster.org/pub/Atari/CTH/Programming/Assembly/AtariBasicSourceBook.zip

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I hope none of you got coal in your stocking from old Saint Nick. In case that turns out to be a reference unique to the United States, I'll explain... Santa Claus is supposed to fill good children's stockings with toys and bad children's stockings with coal.

I guess that whoever started that tradition didn't envision fuel prices being what they are today!

Anyway, I hope that your holiday was happy and healthy. I try to keep things here religion-free, but this holiday seems to be a sort of a focal point. At least three religions have holy days during this short period. That in itself makes it special. If nothing else, it gives us a reason to take a look at what's going on around us and think a bit about what's important to us. And if that's not enough, the beginning of a brand new year is just around the corner.

Since humans first decided to map the march of the seasons, the beginning of each year has signified a new start. New opportunities, new possibilities and, of course, new challenges present themselves and it is up to us to do what we can.

May each of you find a stocking full of possibilities laid out before you this coming year.

The NewsGroup seems to be a little thin this week, so the column is going to be short. Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Mirko asks:

"Is it possible to connect an old EGA Monitor (supports up to 80Hz) to an Atari ST?

If yes, can I find a connection schematic somewhere on the web?"

Dave Wade tells Mirko:

"But its a DIGITAL monitor, 2 Bits per colour. You STE only outputs Analogue Video. I can't remember how many possible colours there are but I know its more than the 64 the EGA will display.

I suppose you might get it to do MONO but I don't think the line rate on the EGA is fast enough for that.

"Phantomm" asks:

"Anyone in North America know if Systems For Tomorrow and ChroMagic are still in the Atari business?

I think that B@C and Best are.

Are there any other Atari hardware/software dealers in the USA?"

Edward Baiz tells Phantomm:

"As far as I know they (SFT and ChroMagic) are, but they also do other platforms.

...try these sites:

http://www.vme.net/dvm/aty/
http://www.myatari.com/
http://www.teleport.com/~bensmith/bscomputers.shtml
http://www.best-electronics-ca.com/
http://chromagic.digistar.com/
http://www.SystemsForTomorrow.com/
http://www.iarelative.com/ "

Dan Ackerman tells us about the latest CAB.OVL:

"Well I think I got it working well enough to do a general release. There might be a few problems running around still, so keep a back up of your current OVL.

http://www.netset.com/~baldrick/

Changes:

> Numerous small changes patches and fixes.
> HTTP 1.1 compliance in place.
> User can now configure OVL to not display the infamous POST/GET/CANCEL dialog.

Have a happy holiday and I hope you enjoy this small gift from me."

Charles Stanley speaks for many of us when he tells Dan:

"Thank you very much, Dan, for your gift and all your gifts.

May I ask you to explain just what the @@@ that infamous message box means and what is the result of clicking one or the other, please?"

James Pinson asks about fixing a hard drive problem:

"A program I just installed on my Atari ST's hard drive has caused the drive to freeze on boot up. If this were a PC, I'd just boot off a boot disk, delete the offending program, and all would be OK. But as near as I can tell, there's no equivalent on the ST. Am I wrong? How can I gain access to my hard drive to delete the program that's keeping the drive from booting?

Thanks for any relevant advice."

Peter West tells Jim:

"You don't say which hard disk driver you are using. With most of them you can press [Control] to bypass all AUTO folder programs, and holding down [Alternate] boots from the floppy. I hope you have kept a copy of your hard driver on floppy! If so, boot from that, install new icons on the desktop the usual way, and you can start up the hard disk and access it as normal to delete the program..."

Jim Logan adds his thoughts:

"Hold down the Alt key while booting, run your hard driver from a floppy, put an icon for drive C on the desktop and open it."

Chris Thorley adds:

"If you can make up a boot disk up try booting up using that.You can try and force the computer to boot from the 'A:' drive by holding down the <Alt> key on switch on and keeping it depressed until it starts booting from that drive.This might enable you to get at the 'C:' partition on its own."

'Dennis' asks about configuring Gemulator to work with MagiC:

"Does anyone have any experience running Gemulator 2000 with MagicPC6.0? I found the German demo, but I'm a bit queasy on installing it if I don't know what I'm doing. I remember running earlier versions of Magic and Gemulator on an older PC a few years back without too many problems, but it's been a while, so I thought I'd ask around here before I do something silly."

'Mark' tells Dennis:

"Magic PC is a version of magic that runs directly on a PC, Gemulator is an ST Emulator they will not work together in the manor you talk about.

If you want to run Magic only then use Magic PC, if you want to use Gemulator with Magic then you need a standard ST Magic (as it were)."

William Wong asks about serial transfer speed:

"Over christmas, I transferred over 26MB of stuff off my Falcon to my PC so that I can backup them on a CDR. It took over, 2 hours over a RS232 link, at 115Kbps & 8N1 settings. I was using Zmodem, and the rate was 3200CPS.

Why shouldn't it be 115200/9 = 12800CPS?? It seems to be 4x slower."

Dan Ackerman tells William:

"Because PC's are notoriously bad with serial connections. I've

seen situations in the past where we had to set the speed to 32k on the serial port to get the NULL modem to work at all, anything faster and too many packets would be dropped to make it worthwhile."

William tells Dan:

"Me thinks that my 933MHz PC can take that 115Kbps speed.
The motherboard specs seems to say it’s a 16550 plus UART chip (what ever that means).

Anyway, I don’t think that any packets was dropped as the error count was 0 and I was monitoring it for about 5-10 minutes before I started monitor another screen ... TV.

I wonder if it’s something to do with zmodem protocol."

Dan replies:

"IF I were in hardware mode I would remember, I could look it up if it really mattered. But yes that chip should handle 115k, if you have a decent bios that chip should handle 230k.

[ZModem as the culprit] is possible, but it doesn’t conflict that much with my experience in the past. There is a conflict that occurs somewhere along the line and if you slow the PC serial port down the actual transfer rate increases. This was what we saw on 486’s, a media gx and most recently a P2 400. I didn’t have this sort of problem null modem to a mac and even the mac people will admit that mac serial isn’t everything it could be.

As to the zmodem, that is possible as well. Back in the bbs days we always used to use ymodem 1k, actually generally gave us a better through put."

Edward Baiz adds:

"I would have used PARCP for the transfer. It uses the parallel ports at a speed of 100,000 bytes/sec..."

Edward Baiz posts this about HDDriver and his Hades:

"I just received my HDDriver upgrade to 8.01. This version does not seem to have the cache problem for the Hades like the other versions. I can access my Jaz drive and the HDDriver utilities program without turning off the instruction cache. Nice..."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. See? I told you it was going to be a short column.

Please be careful when out on the road during the upcoming holiday. I myself prefer to stay home and celebrate quietly. I figure that there are enough fools on the road without adding one more.

See you "next year"! ’Till then, keep your ears open and listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nintendo Denies Sega Takeover!
Sega To Do Game Boy Software?!
AquaAqua!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Nintendo, Sega Deny Takeover Report

Leading Japanese video game makers Nintendo Co. and Sega Corp. on Wednesday denied a published report that Nintendo is mulling a buyout of Sega.

''The information in some overseas report that we are buying Sega is completely wrong," Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi said in a statement.

Sega also issued a statement, saying news of the buyout ''is completely false" and that the company ''would like to deny all reports related to the matter."

The New York Times reported in its Wednesday edition that executives close to the negotiations said the deal could see Nintendo acquiring Sega for about $2 billion.

The report, citing executives it did not identify, said the talks have been going on for months and the deal could still collapse.

The report comes as Sega struggles to survive intensifying competition.

Sega said in October that it no longer expected to turn a profit after years of losses and projected a group net loss of 22.1 billion yen ($194 million) for the year ending March 2001. That was a reversal from the previous forecast of net profit of 1.5 billion yen ($13 million).

Price cuts in the United States and Europe of Sega's Dreamcast video game systems are weighing on the company's earnings as the cost of producing the online gaming service remains high.

Sega faces formidable challenges from domestic rivals - Nintendo, the creator of Mario games, and Sony Corp., which introduced the hugely successful PlayStation2 vido game console.

Nintendo is expected to release a new game machine GameCube next year while overseas U.S. software company Microsoft Corp. is vying to enter the video game market in 2001 with a game console called X-Box.

Nintendo Says Sega May Supply Game Boy Software

Game machine maker Nintendo Co Ltd said on Thursday that rival Sega Corp may supply software for its ‘‘Game Boy Advance" game machine.

But a Nintendo spokesman denied a report in the evening edition of newspaper Sankei Shimbun that the two firms are in talks on collaboration to develop software for the machine.

A Sega spokeswoman said it could not comment on the report.

On Wednesday, both firms denied a New York Times report that Nintendo was in talks to buy Sega for about $2 billion.

Nintendo’s Game Boy Advance, a next-generation wireless game player to be launched next March, is a successor to the existing Game Boy, global sales of which have reached 100 million units.

3DO Ships AquaAqua for PlayStation2

Try Not to Get Wet With This Irresistible Watery Puzzle Game From 3DO

The 3DO Company announced it has begun shipping the AquaAqua game for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system. Developed by Zed Two, Ltd., the AquaAqua game is an addictive, fast-action, 3D puzzle game set in a liquid landscape. Players trap water by positioning pieces as fast as they fall to form dams and lakes. Watch the weather; if it rains too much your lake will overflow and the water goes down the drain. Lose too much water and it’s ‘‘game over."

Players maneuver land pieces to create hills and mountains that form lakes that hold water pieces and the rain. Water pieces are dropped in the hills and mountains to create lakes of all sizes. Deep lakes attract lake mates and the more lake mates you have, the higher your score will be. If too much water accumulates in one spot and leaks out, you can dry it up with a Fireball and score points. Downer pieces can be used to decrease land mass whish decreases the chance of an earthquake. Watch out for those Bombs, though; they can leave holes through which precious water can escape.

The AquaAqua game features three addictive play modes in which to play. In Story Puzzle Mode you clear stages and travel through four different time periods in the earth’s history. Players also come face-to-face with monsters that try to thwart their progress. Quick Puzzle Mode is where you play any cleared stage for maximum score. VS. Puzzle Mode enables you to play head-to-head against a friend. With play this fun and absorbing, you won’t want to stop!

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The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Could Profit From Bush Victory

Microsoft could benefit from the election of George Bush as U.S. president, as the former Texas governor has indicated he is not in full agreement with the U.S. Justice Department's decision to break up the software giant, the New York Times reported on Tuesday.

''I stand on the side of innovation, not litigation," the paper quoted Bush as saying last spring. Bush is troubled by the court decision to break the company in two, the paper said.

Bush aides have said there is no decision on how to handle the case yet, but the attorney general-designate, Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri, has not taken a firm stand on the matter, the paper added.

''The signs are that (the case) isn't the kind of thing (Ashcroft) would be enthusiastic about," the paper quoted a senior Clinton administration official as saying.

eBay Cracks Down On Members' Offline Deals

eBay is cracking down on offline business deals between its buyers and sellers that circumvent the fees normally paid to the online auction company.

Effective immediately, eBay will first warn, then suspend, members who use their eBay connection to conduct business offline. For example, it is against eBay rules for a person to contact a losing bidder on eBay to offer that person the same product without going through eBay.

The company also announced that it would start cracking down on spam, or unsolicited email, sent to its members.

The rules against offline trading have been in place for some time, eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove said Wednesday. But the company initially chose not to enforce the rules against offline deals at the request of members, he said.

However, fraud that occurs in those offline transactions and spam have become the two biggest complaints eBay receives from members, prompting the changes, Pursglove said.

"In the very early days, many of our users didn't want us to crack down on offline trading. They felt it built a sense of community on eBay," he said. "That may have been appropriate in the early days, but it isn't appropriate now."

For most auctions, eBay charges about $2 or less to list an item and a transaction fee of up to 5 percent of the closing bid. Additional fees may apply to real estate, auto listings or reserve auctions.

Some eBay members complained on AuctionWatch.com’s message boards that the new rules are draconian, stifling legitimate commerce and communications between bidders and sellers.

"Someone out there has lost their grip," wrote one member. "Obviously eBay needs to rustle up more money. Sales are down. They ain’t looking so good on paper. Did it ever occur to them to be more conciliatory toward their sellers? No. Instead there is going to be a long list of ’thou shalt nots.’"

Under the rules, sellers are banned from offering to sell items offline to people other than the high bidder in their auctions. This means sellers would violate the rules if they contacted not only people bidding on competitors’ auctions, but those bidding on their own items.

Sellers also are not allowed to send unsolicited email to people about products similar to what they have bid on in the past. It wasn’t spelled out whether sellers can contact bidders about such products if they are offered on eBay.

The rules also target bidders, banning them from contacting sellers about purchasing a listed item away from eBay.

These sorts of scenarios are not uncommon on eBay. Many small businesses use eBay like they would banner ads or newspaper classifieds: as a way to draw in new customers.

It’s not unusual, for instance, for sellers to contact losing bidders offering similar goods to the ones they just sold. And buyers often contact sellers to find out whether they can purchase items such as tickets in advance of the date the auction closes.

Auction service sites such as AuctionWatch and Auctionworks have customer relations management software that allows auction sellers to create databases of their customers. Such databases could be used to send unsolicited email to bidders or to offer products to eBay members off of eBay.

In some cases, such as reserve auctions, eBay has even encouraged sellers to contact losing bidders to inform them of the reserve price and to offer the item offline, said Rosalinda Baldwin, editor of The Auction Guild, an online newsletter. In reserve auctions, a seller won’t sell the item unless bidding reaches a preset, hidden price.

"What was once good manners is now a violation of eBay rules," Baldwin said. "All this does is (upset) what is left of the eBay community."

eBay is not able to collect a fee on sales between eBay members that occur offline. Some eBay members and industry experts suggested that new rules are part of an effort to boost the company’s revenues.

Pursglove said the amount of revenue lost to offline transactions is "insignificant" for the company, and that the changes were prompted by customer complaints. In addition, offline transactions are not covered by the company’s insurance program or feedback system, and eBay is powerless to investigate them should fraud occur, he said.

"This is probably the largest source of fraud complaints that we get in our customer service department," he said.

Some eBay members questioned how the company will police the policies since it will have to rely on members themselves to turn in their fellow members.

"Do they really think sellers are going to turn business away just because eBay isn't getting their cut?" wrote one seller on AuctionWatch who said he often gets email from bidders wanting more copies of his auction items. "They should concentrate on getting the deadbeats and bad sellers off eBay and bring in more bidders."

And a self-policing community could lead to abuse, such as a seller trying to get a rival kicked off eBay by asking the person to sell his or her goods offline.

"This whole thing is supposed to be based on honesty and trust, and they're doing the one thing that will ruin that honesty and trust," Baldwin said.

The rules are only the latest controversy between eBay and its auction community. Earlier this year, some members complained about the promotional deal eBay signed with Keen.com, the relaunch of its automotive site, and an effort to clean up auctions of pornographic material. In each case, some members felt that eBay was not communicating with its community and was unfairly restricting or affecting people's ability to trade on the site.

eBay Policy Shift Angers Users

This week's decision by eBay to enforce a prohibition on offline deals between members has angered many users, sparking allegations that the Internet auction giant's stated goal of protecting its customers is disingenuous.

It has long been the official policy of eBay to prohibit members from arranging deals outside the confines of cyberspace, but company spokesman Henry Gomez told the E-Commerce Times that eBay announced its intention to enforce the policy after receiving complaints from members.

However, at least one auction insider believes eBay's priority is profit, and that the move will lead to "further alienation of sellers." Rosalinda Baldwin, editor of the online newsletter The Auction Guild, told the E-Commerce Times that the enforcement will "increase mistrust between sellers and buyers" and lead to "further degradation of the weak and dying 'community.'"

Gomez said that eBay decided to enforce the policy in order to protect its users, because buyers who choose to conduct business outside of eBay are not protected by the company's insurance program or feedback system.

Some of the users who had purchased items in so-called offline transactions were not even aware that they were doing so, according to Gomez. He said the company has had "lots of complaints" over the past several months by people who thought they were protected by eBay but actually were not.

"They come back to us when they've been wronged and we have no way to help," Gomez said.

Under the new policy, sellers who use their eBay connections to conduct business offline will first be warned and then suspended from the site. Prohibited conduct includes offering to sell a listed item outside of eBay to avoid paying a listing fee, as well as offering to sell users merchandise similar to what they are bidding on at eBay.

Also prohibited is sending unsolicited e-mail, or spam, to people met through eBay.

Despite eBay's contention that the rule change is designed to protect its community, some users believe the adjustment was made to protect eBay's profit margin. Baldwin claims that eBay needs "to do something to attempt to boost their revenue for the fourth quarter."

Added Baldwin, "Depending on what else they do, [eBay] might give us a better idea of which financial reason they are doing this for -- such as another insider stock sale, or possibly a sale of eBay to a company like GM, or an attempt on eBay's part to buy some of the other dot-com companies."

Baldwin is not the only observer questioning eBay's motives. Frustrated sellers have filled message boards across the Web with complaints about the policy change.

Even eBay's Gomez conceded that the move was at least partially profit driven. He said that if sellers are using eBay to advertise their products, then the company "should collect those fees."

Some eBay users also believe that the San Jose, California-based auction house will have a hard time enforcing the rule without turning members into tattletales.

"Whatever goes on between people (buyers, sellers, other sundry capitalists) outside of eBay is none of eBay's business," one poster at eBay's message board wrote. "And how the devil is eBay going to know what is in the correspondence (e-mail, phone calls, etc.) between potential buyers and sellers?"

Noted Baldwin: "In truth, eBay cannot enforce these policies unless sellers and buyers snitch on each other, and unless they start offering a bounty, there is little reason for folks to do this."

Bluelight And Netzero Now Almost Free

'Road closed' signs and toll booths are popping up all over the Information Superhighway, particularly for once-free Internet service rides like Kmart's Bluelight.com and Netzero, as those services struggle to pay their own bills and stay in business.

Kmart, which recently bought the troubled free Internet service provider (ISP) Spinway, announced that users who log on to Bluelight.com for more than 25 hours per month will be cut off from the service until the following month. The company said the moves were necessary to avoid losing Spinway's customer base.

Kmart's move was preceded by Netzero's announcement that users of its free

Internet service would be limited to 40 hours a month, incurring fees after that.

The two announcements are the latest in the trend of free Internet services, used by some 10 to 20 million users, that have gone out of business or started charging fees to cover operating and marketing costs amid falling advertising revenues.

Kmart's takeover of Spinway was aimed at giving the company an online presence after it learned that more than half its customers were not connected to the Web.

Kmart says the limit on monthly Bluelight usage is intended to control heavy Net users until the company can support its 5.2 million users with a new service in February. According to Kmart, the small group of online gluttons reportedly account for nearly half the costs associated with running the service.

While Bluelight users who spend more than 25 hours a month online will simply be cut off, Netzero users who exceed 40 hours a month can continue logging on for about US$10.

The year that began with a number of companies offering free Internet service was also marked by announcements of failures and new fee-based plans. AltaVista, the latest free ISP to halt service, cut off some three million users earlier this month.

AltaVista joined a handful of free ISPs, including WorldSpy, FreeInternet.com and Freewwweb, which have closed down in the last six months.

A lack of advertising revenue and increased operating costs are the main causes of problems for the free ISPs. AltaVista said it ceased operations because 1stUP Corp., the company that provided its telecommunications and infrastructure, went out of business.

Despite failures and fees, analysts say this is not the end of free Internet service. The concept still holds the potential to lure customers, deliver advertising and collect demographic information, according to researchers Strategis Group.

The Internet analyst predicts there will be 35 million users of free ISP services by 2005. Another research firm, Jupiter Research, predicts the number of free ISP users will jump from the current 8 percent to 13 percent by 2003.

While Bluelight and Netzero were among the few remaining free services, Juno is the last major ISP to remain totally free. The online company that began with free e-mail service in 1996 now has about 3.7 million active customers for its free Internet service, making it the third-largest ISP in the U.S.

Meanwhile, the "free" ISPs are not making life any easier for one another. Netzero filed a patent infringement suit against rival Juno in U.S District Court in Los Angeles on Wednesday, claiming that Juno used Netzero's patented process for displaying online ad windows without permission.

However, according to Charles Ardai, Juno's president and chief executive officer, the patent suit was probably in retaliation to an as-yet

unresolved patent infringement suit that Juno filed against NetZero last June.

NetZero Files Lawsuit Against Juno

Free Internet access pioneer NetZero Inc. has filed a patent infringement lawsuit over advertising windows used by rival Juno Online Services.

Westlake Village-based NetZero filed the lawsuit Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles. The company has declined to comment further on the lawsuit, said spokeswoman Allison Chesher on Wednesday.

NetZero claims that its patent covers the technology used to present an on-screen advertising window that pops up separate from an Internet browser.

The window serves as a navigational tool and displays advertisements and customized messages while a computer user is online.

NetZero offers free dial-up access to users who are willing to provide information about their Internet surfing habits and allow a stream of advertisements to appear in a portion of their screens while online.

Juno officials Wednesday denied infringing on NetZero’s patent.

‘‘On the contrary, we believe that NetZero has been infringing a key patent held by Juno, in connection with which Juno filed a lawsuit against NetZero in June of this year," Charles Ardai, Juno’s president and chief executive officer, said in a statement. ‘‘We look forward to seeing both our suit against NetZero and this new suit brought by NetZero resolved through the appropriate legal process."

Juno, with about 3.7 million subscribers, is the nation’s third-largest Internet service provider behind AOL and EarthLink.

Napster Updates Software As Court Case Looms

Despite the uncertain outcome of a court case that threatens to deal Napster a potentially fatal blow, the music-swapping service has released an updated version of its software that makes it easier to find specific songs and bands.

The release is proof that development is continuing at the San Mateo, Calif.-based start-up, even as it awaits the outcome of a federal court case that threatens to shut down the service almost in its entirety.

A federal appeals court is still reviewing the decision of a trial court judge to block trades of most copyrighted music using Napster’s software. That decision, though put on hold just hours after it was issued, served as a turning point in the music industry’s battle against encroaching online music companies.

Many court-watchers had expected a decision from the Ninth Circuit panel of appeals judges before now, but a ruling still could come any day.

The updated software gives a small indication of what Napster's developers are doing as they work toward creating a new subscription-based service with German media conglomerate Bertelsmann.

The two companies have yet to give details on the planned service, part of a landmark deal announced in October. Both parties have said that the original Napster software will remain in place in some form, but that a better version will be available for a fee. Bertelsmann and Napster are still trying to bring other major record labels into their alliance, however.

The software upgrade, dubbed 2.0 beta 8, offers a handful of new features, including a "Boolean minus sign," which people can use to exclude certain items from their searches. For example, entering the search term "Primitive" will return results for Primitive Reason and Primitive Radio Gods. Now a Napster user who does not want returns for Primitive Reason can type "Primitive -Reason."

The new software, which can be downloaded on Napster's Web site for free, also lets people rename MP3 and Windows Media Audio files from within Napster.

In addition, "many minor bugs have been fixed," the company said in its newsletter.

Music fans discussing the updated software on message boards had mixed reactions.

"Personally I like it," wrote one Napster user, identified only as "solidstate23." "They fixed the bug that froze up the search function, added a Boolean minus to the search, and made it so you can rename files from inside the client. Those were on my top five list of fixes that needed to be made. It also seems to run smoother."

Others complained that music files downloaded with the new software were being stored in their computer's C drive, rather than in specifically designated folders.

"All my downloaded songs go to the c drive, I cannot get them to go into the music or my files folder," wrote a message board poster, identified as "genie25." "Oh well, back to beta 7 for me."

Still others complained that the updated software left them unable to log on to independent, non-Napster servers using the program Napigator.

Napigator offers a way for people to swap songs from independent servers using Napster's software, but without using Napster's servers.

Chatting on Napigator's Web site, users of Napster's software seemed certain that it would not remain incompatible with independent servers for long.

"Resolution of that will occur shortly, one would assume, as the independent servers simply update their software," wrote "Steve G."

PayPal To Issue Debit Cards

PayPal, an Internet-based ‘‘digital cash" payment network, will begin issuing MasterCard debit cards to its customers, the company said Thursday.

PayPal’s 5 million users will now be able to untether themselves and their cash from the computer to make their purchases.

To date, PayPal members have primarily used the system to conduct online auction transactions.

A buyer using PayPal provides a credit card or bank account number so PayPal can withdraw a specified amount. The seller is then notified by e-mail and has the option of either cashing out or carrying a digital cash balance to conduct other online business.

PayPal accounts aren’t insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. like banks, but the company does offer up to $100,000 in insurance coverage per account.

Mac Version of StarOffice Next Summer?

Now that Apple and Sun are working more closely together, Mac users have been hoping that Sun’s StarOffice product will come to the Mac platform sooner. According to the updated StarOffice Frequently Asked Questions Web site, Sun is "targeting availability [of version 5.2] by summer 2001."

StarOffice is a downloadable cross-platform office productivity suite that includes components for word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail, graphics, Web publishing, scheduling, database, and management applications.

On the FAQ page, it was asked, "How committed is Sun to having StarOffice software available on multiple platforms and as a standalone product?" Sun’s answer: "Our commitment to the standalone product is firm. Although we are excited about revolutionizing the productivity software market with StarPortal, we realize that standalone software is important now and for many years to come. The StarOffice suite will continue to be an integral part of the total application solution."

In October, Sun released the source code for the StarOffice suite, opening the way for possible development for the Mac under OS X by others. The reason for the open-source, according to the company, is to follow its core principles to develop and support open standards and compete on implementations. Other reasons include the development of a higher quality product as more development means fewer bugs and new features coming faster to market, as more programmers would be working on the product.

With the code now open, the possibilities of it being ported to the Macintosh platform are wide open, although the project would be a monumental task, according to a number of programmers with whom MacCentral spoke.

’Big Brother’ Knocked In 2000

For privacy experts, 2000 looked more like 1984.

Workplace surveillance was the leading privacy concern in 2000, according to an analysis released Thursday by the Privacy Foundation, a Denver-based nonprofit that performs research and educates the public on privacy issues.

This year, millions of Americans were watched at work, as employers became increasingly concerned about employee productivity and their use of the Internet. Two-thirds of major U.S. companies now perform some type of in-house electronic surveillance, according to the American Management Association, and 27 percent of all companies surveyed now monitor email.

The Big Brother tactic has led to some people losing their jobs. Dow Chemical fired 24 employees and disciplined 235 others in September for allegedly storing and sending sexual or violent images on the company's computers. Xerox, The New York Times Co. and the CIA were others that fired or disciplined employees because of alleged bad behavior.

"Employers may be rightly concerned about security and productivity issues, or legal liability arising from emailed sexual banter," Stephen Keating, executive director of the Privacy Foundation, said in a statement.

"But pervasive or spot-check surveillance conducted through keystroke monitoring software, reviewing voice-mail messages, and using mini-video cameras will undoubtedly affect morale and labor law, as well as employee recruitment and retention practices," he added.

In the future, the foundation predicts that employers, especially so-called New Economy companies, may offer "spy free" workplaces as a fringe benefit.

Keeping medical records private was the second most important privacy concern in 2000, according to the report. Fears that personal medical data, disclosed to medical practitioners, could reach the wrong hands propelled new federal rules in December. The new policy, which could be delayed in Congress in the coming year, will require doctors to get patient consent to use medical records in routine matters, as well as give patients more access to their own records.

Privacy issues surrounding Carnivore, the online surveillance technology developed by the FBI for investigations, fell into the survey's top three. Civil libertarians fear that the FBI could use Carnivore to watch people through entry points to the Web or randomly read email communications. Privacy advocates criticized the FBI for releasing too little information about the surveillance technology in October.

Online advertising network DoubleClick also received top billing this year for its widely noted but unrealized plans to merge anonymous online customer data with personally identifiable offline data from subsidiary Abacus Direct.

After public outcry and a federal investigation, DoubleClick postponed its plans. But the issue highlighted the online profiling practices of online ad networks and marketers, causing a number of legal cases to be filed against online companies.

Because of such heightened privacy concerns in 2000, companies including Microsoft, IBM and American Express hired for a new position: chief privacy officer. In the future, the foundation predicts that universities will offer degree programs in privacy and business.

These were some other top privacy concerns in 2000:

* Online customer data became a hot commodity, prompting online retailers to change their privacy policies and inciting privacy advocates and legislators to tighten their watch over them.

For example, federal regulators blocked Toysmart.com from selling customer data after the company went out of business. And Amazon.com came under fire after changing its privacy policy to allow for transferring customer data in certain instances.

* Privacy fears cropped up regarding new legislation that allows financial institutions to combine customer information housed under different divisions and potentially share it with third parties, as long as they notify customers and provide them the option to opt out.

Advocates are concerned that the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act doesn’t go far enough to protect consumers with the transfer of online information. In 2001, many more consumers may complain about the mishandling of their personal data by financial institutions.

* Wireless tracking technologies raised privacy hackles. Location-sensing technology for cell phones, under a new federal program called E911, and new ad-delivery plans fueled questions about privacy and receiving unsolicited email, or spam, via handheld devices.

The Privacy Foundation predicts that tech companies and federal regulators will keep spam at bay by setting industry standards on consumer choice to receive text messages.

* Microsoft issued a software patch for Internet Explorer that lets Web surfers automatically block third-party "cookies," or electronic surveillance tags often set by online advertisers to track surfing habits.

Bowing to pressure from some in the online advertising industry whose businesses rely on placing third-party cookies, the company has retreated from incorporating such controls into the upcoming version of IE and instead will support the Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P) standard for IE 6.0. P3P allows Web surfers to control their privacy preferences when they visit Web sites.

In the coming year, the foundation predicts that "Web bugs," or barely visible tracking tags, and other online surveillance methods will upstage cookies.

* Email and computer server logs played a larger role in court cases in 2000. The federal antitrust trial against Microsoft tapped archived emails, and during the 2000 presidential election, the media sought the email communications of Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

In 2001, the Privacy Foundation predicts much more of this kind of activity as people tap public open-record laws.

Workplace Spying Topped Year’s Privacy Debate

Driven by inexpensive monitoring technology and concerns regarding Internet security, the issue of workplace surveillance has emerged as the top privacy story of the year 2000, according to the Denver,

Colorado-based Privacy Foundation.

Of the 10 most pressing privacy issues that the non-profit, non-partisan organization identified, 8 involved the Internet and high-tech sectors. Also on the list were the FBI's Carnivore e-mail surveillance system, attempts by Net firms like Amazon to secure customer profiles as marketable assets, and the rise of the chief privacy officer (CPO) as a common executive position.

Privacy Foundation executive director Stephen Keating told NewsFactor that he knew workplace surveillance was a top story after the foundation tracked incidences of workplace surveillance and connected them to reports that people were losing their jobs.

The Foundation cites scores of well-known U.S. companies including Xerox, Dow Chemical and The New York Times, as well as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), that have terminated or disciplined workers over the past 12 months for using company communication technology in a way they deemed inappropriate.

The report found that two-thirds of major firms in the U.S. use some kind of electronic surveillance on their employees, and 27 percent of all companies surveyed their employees' e-mail accounts. Monitoring Web surfing behavior and telephone use were also among the most common forms of surveillance.

"Productivity and security issues are what employers are most concerned about," Keating said. "All the leverage is in the employer's hands, so when you add up the new technology and the keystroke and video monitoring of workers, it creates an intensive situation for employees."

Keating added that employees are not always clear on how company surveillance policies work. "Often what we find is a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, and it's only when the policy is enforced that it has visibility," he said.

Specifically, because most employees work on an "at-will" basis -- meaning that employers and employees each have the right to terminate the working relationship at any time -- employers are free to engage in a wide variety of surveillance techniques.

However, skilled high-tech job candidates of the future, Keating suggests, are likely to begin requesting a "spy-free" workplace as a condition of their employment. "Workers are becoming more cognizant about the privacy issue and raising it with employers when they take a new job," he said.

Third on the Privacy Foundation's list was the FBI's Carnivore e-mail surveillance program. The Carnivore system works with an Internet service provider (ISP) to filter e-mail and target specific, "meaty" messages.

The FBI has argued throughout the year that the system was designed specifically to be used in criminal investigations, but the agency has drawn sharp criticism from privacy advocates and public officials, who say that Carnivore compromises the privacy rights of law-abiding Net users.

The top 10 list also included Amazon's controversial policy to consider the profiles of its 23 million customers to be marketable assets should its operations be sold to another company. Company CEO Jeff Bezos said Amazon adopted the new policy in part because it is now the parent of many smaller companies that might be sold or consolidated as part of Amazon's

growth strategy and drive toward profitability.

Amazon’s move seemed to be a direct response to the flap in July surrounding Toysmart.com’s decision to sell the names, addresses and buying habits of thousands of customers who used its site before it ceased operations.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) stepped in to block the identity firesale, noting that Toysmart.com had previously promised consumers it would protect their privacy rights.

Fifth on the Privacy Foundation’s list was the emergence of the corporate position of chief privacy officer (CPO), as companies address the need to shape and enforce privacy policies.

The trend began with small Internet firms that needed to ensure that their company’s practices complied with government privacy regulations. Now, larger high-tech firms like IBM and Microsoft have signed on CPOs with public relations and legal backgrounds to be accountable for privacy questions and to ensure a secure online environment for customers.

Top 10 privacy issues of 2000:

1. Workplace surveillance
2. Patient privacy rules
3. Carnivore attacked
4. DoubleClick debacle
5. The advent of chief privacy officers
6. Changing privacy policies
7. Merging financial information
8. Wireless privacy battles
9. Microsoft cookie-blocking software
10. Emails, Web activity sought in legal cases

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